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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000600

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT ASKS CO-CHAIRS FOR STRONG RESPONSE AS  
TIGER ATTACKS CONTINUE; SECOND ROUND OF GENEVA TALKS IN  
JEOPARDY

REF: A) COLOMBO 583 (B) OSLO 467

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Co-Chair ambassadors, minus the U.S., pushed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) hard in an August 10 meeting to make clear its commitment to "Geneva II" but the Tigers are focused on the "transportation issue" in which the GSL has refused to chopper Eastern Tigers to the North for a pre-Geneva LTTE huddle. The GSL, in a late April 12 briefing of the diplomatic corps, made clear that it remains committed to going to Geneva, even after a series of bombings including this afternoon's in a Trincomalee market which apparently killed civilians and has led to revenge mob violence there. As of COB April 12, it is not clear if the Tigers will appear in Geneva. GSL behavior since Geneva I has not been perfect but the latest LTTE violence, coming around the co-chairs trip to Kilinochchi, is over the top and appears to be an intentional slap at the co-chairs. END SUMMARY

Co-Chairs Meet Tigers  
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¶2. (C) Co-Chair Chiefs of Mission (COM's) minus the US traveled to Kilinocchi Monday April 10 to meet with LTTE political head Tamilchelvan and deliver strong message to LTTE as agreed with GSL President Rajapakse the previous week (ref A). Immediately after returning to Colombo, COM's (Netherlands Ambassador van Dijk, Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar), joined by Ambassador Lunstead, met with Peace Secretariat (SCOPP) head Palitha Kohona for debriefing.

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(Japanese Ambassador Suda and EC Rep Wilson had traveled to Kilinocchi, but did not participate in debrief. Meeting took place shortly after word of LTTE claymore mine attack on Army

vehicle near Jaffna (septel).

13. (C) According to van Dijk,

--Tigers listened somberly to co-chair points about need for Tigers to do what they said they'd do at Geneva

--Tigers clearly obsessed with "transportation issue" i.e. their denied request for the GSL to airlift their cadres so Northern and Eastern elements can meet and coordinate before Geneva II on April 19. The Tigers are insisting it must be by helo, rejecting GSL offered of air-conditioned ferry. This has clearly has become a point of honor between the two sides. Kohona said that GSL was refusing helo transport for "security reasons" and anyway, "Why should LTTE get helicopter transport when Sri Lankan Army generals did not have such facilities"? Ambassador Lunstead responded forcefully that this was silly: if Geneva II were agreed to, the GSL would move LTTE delegates from the Wannu to Colombo airport by helicopter, not by air-conditioned ferry. Why then the stress on this now? Kohona looked a bit abashed at this. (Comment: Newly-installed SCOPP Deputy Kethesh Loganathan had told us earlier that same morning that it was the military which was refusing to give the Tigers helo transport, and that no one on the civilian side seemed able or willing to overrule them. This leaves civilians like Kohona in the uncomfortable position of making lame excuses.)

--Tigers pledged to abstain from attacks. COM's said this was not enough, they needed to move to a political discussion with the Government.

14. (C) Van Dijk said that he then told the LTTE, speaking for

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the EU, not the Co-Chairs, that the EU had already decided that the Tigers qualified for listing as a terrorist organization. Such a listing had been avoided only because of the ongoing political process. If the Tigers wished to avert a listing, they needed to (1) abstain from violence and (2) engage politically with the GSL. Tamilchelvam's response was that the Tigers had gone it alone before, they could go it alone again if necessary. Van Dijk emphasized that the international community would hate to disengage but it was up to the Tigers.

15. (C) Van Dijk said the Co-Chairs made three points to the Tigers regarding the planned Geneva II talks:

--President Rajapakse had asked the Co-Chairs to convey to the Tigers that he was committed to fulfilling the commitments the GSL had made at Geneva I.

--The President had also given absolute assurances on the security of the LTTE delegation while transiting Colombo airport.

--The President wanted to resolve the "transport" issue, and the GSL would communicate with the Tigers through the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM).

Another LTTE attack

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16. (C) Afternoon of Tuesday, April 11 there was another claymore attack in Trincomalee which killed 12 Sri Lanka Navy personnel in a bus traveling for holiday leave. (Details septel). Peace Secretariat (SCOPP) Secretary General Palitha Kohona immediately asked Co-Chairs to come for a meeting. Present at meeting late April 11 afternoon (a local holiday) were SCOPP head Palitha Kohona, Def Sec Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Chief of Defense Staff Admiral Sandagiri, Presidential Adviser Nivard Cabrall, plus staff. Co-Chairs had Ambassador Lunstead, Netherlands Amb van Dijk, Japanese Amb Suda and Norwegian PolCouns. Norwegian Amb Brattskar was unable to

come as he was on the phone continuously with Norwegian peace envoys Eric Solheim and Jon Hanssen-Bauer.

17. (C) Kohona said that he had asked C-Chairs to this meeting with express authorization of President. The incident near Trinco with 12 sailors dead, several civilians badly injured, including at least one UK national, was similar to the previous day's Jaffna attack. "This type of incident cannot be allowed to pass." The GSL was busy making preps for Geneva II. In fact, they had been holding preparatory meetings when the word of the latest attack came in. "The Tigers continue to provoke us, we don't know how long the Admiral can hold his men back." There was a limit to what the GSL could take. The sailors killed were on a bus, unarmed and on their way home for the New Years holiday. The President had agreed to the previous day's Co-Chairs trip to Kilinocchi because a hard message was to be passed, "but these attacks were not in the script." Kohona said he had been instructed by the President to urge the Co-Chairs to take the matter up in the strongest terms. For the EU, he had a message that it was time for them to list the LTTE as a terrorist organization.

18. (C) Kohona continued that the President was taking enormous political risks in maintaining the policy of going to Geneva to talk to the LTTE, and "this is his reward." Cabral added that the LTTE has its hand on the "volume knob" -- it turns up or turns down the violence as it wishes. "For our part," Kohona said, "it is not an option to go to war. We want to continue with negotiations." But it was difficult for

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the President to keep the momentum in these circumstances.

19. (C) Van Dijk responded that a clear message had been given to the LTTE the day before, and in particular that unless there were progress on peace they would likely be listed as a terrorist organization by the EU. Van Dijk said that he had called LTTE Peace Secretariat Head Pulidevan earlier that day after word of the Trinco attack and had "beat the shit out of him." Van Dijk told Pulidevan the international community will not be blackmailed, nor will the GSL. Pulidevan said he would convey the message to his leadership. Norwegian PolCouns added that Oslo had spoken to LTTE lead negotiator Balasingham twice that day.

110. (C) Ambassador Lunstead expressed sympathy for the losses and asked what Kohona meant when he spoke of a limit. What happened past that limit? A return to war would be disastrous for the Government. GSL representatives had no clear answer, except to say that they were committed to peace and to the Geneva talks, but the past few days' events had made this more difficult. Van Dijk added that the Swiss Ambassador had told him that unless there were an answer from the LTTE by Wednesday, April 12 that they were going to Geneva, there would not be enough time to make the practical arrangements. (In an April 12 conversation with DCM, Swiss DCM Sturzinger confirmed that a deadline had been given to try to force the issue but said his government will hang on as long as possible before pulling the plug on the talks for logistical reasons.) An April 19 session therefore now seemed out of the question. Kohona added that he and Pulidevan had discussed the transport issue that morning by phone and that he had been hoping to resolve it, but that now this was so much more difficult.

Geneva Still Uncertain, Norway Sending Tough Letter  
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111. (C) Co-Chair COM's met again morning of April 12. Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar noted there had been 25-30 deaths in the past week, including two policemen killed in yet another claymore mine attack this morning. New SLMM chief Henricsson had been in Jaffna and Kilinochchi and would be in Trincomalee today. Henricsson was being trying to solve the "transport" question. There were many suggestions, but the

Tigers continued to insist on "established practice" of helicopter transport.

¶12. (C) Brattskar continued that both sides were playing a political game. In fact, he said, the real problem was that both sides were failing to take any positive steps after Geneva I to build confidence and move the process forward. Eric Solheim was sending a letter to both parties which would make them both unhappy. It would tell them that they had both missed an opportunity after Geneva I. Both sides needed to show they wanted to move forward; if they could not do that, Norway could not do it for them. They also both need to affirm the role of the SLMM. Brattskar also said that Solheim had spoken to Foreign Minister Samaraweera following Samaraweera's April 8 press interview (SEPTTEL) in which he had criticized both Norway and the SLMM. Samaraweera responded that the positive things he had said about Norway were omitted by the journalist. Basically, Brattskar said, Solheim was telling both sides: "shape up or you don't have a peace process."

Embassy Statement Issued  
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¶13. (U) Embassy issued following statement morning of Aug 12:

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QUOTE: The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent terrorist attacks carried out by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) against the armed forces of Sri Lanka. Our sympathies are with the families of the victims. The U.S. calls upon the LTTE to cease these violent attacks, to return to the ceasefire implementation talks and to engage constructively in the search for a political solution. The U.S. commends the continued restraint of the Government in the face of these provocations. The U.S. also condemns other recent incidents of violence, in particular the April 7 murder of Mr. V. Vigneswaran in Trincomalee. The U.S. calls upon both the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka to fulfill the commitments they made at the February talks in Geneva and to take all possible steps to build a positive atmosphere for future talks. END QUOTE

¶14. (C) All Colombo diplomats were summoned to MFA for briefing by Kohona and Sandagiri afternoon of April 12. Briefing came just moments after news of a bomb explosion at a (Sinhalese) market in Trinco. Details of killed/wounded not known, but we hear that a Sinhalese mob may have formed and begun looting. Briefing largely presented information we had already heard, but Kohona stressed that GSL was still ready to go to Geneva--while emphasizing that attacks were reducing government flexibility.

¶15. (C) COMMENT: While GSL actions have not been perfect, these latest LTTE attacks far surpass any GSL failings. Moreover, coming on the heels of the Co-Chairs visit to Kilinocchi, they seem a direct slap at the Co-Chairs. There is still a very slim chance that the second round of Geneva talks may take place, but these attacks make it even more difficult to resolve the transportation issue which seems to be holding things up. Solheim's letter to both sides is a tough one, as it should be.  
LUNSTEAD